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# SERVICE

## USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE • OFFICE OF COMMUNICATION • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

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### NEW USDA AGENCY FORMED

Consumer-Oriented Activities Realigned. FSQS are the "call letters" of a new USDA agency, the Food Safety and Quality Service. The new agency is actually a realignment of existing USDA programs which, according to USDA officials, will allow the Department to better serve consumers and food producers. It is a kind of "the responsibilities are the same; only the name has been changed" arrangement. FSQS will assume the meat and poultry inspection activities of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). In addition, six functions of the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) will go to FSQS: Meat and poultry grading, inspection and grading of dairy products, egg products inspection, fruit and vegetable grading, and the "Section 32" commodity purchases for feeding programs for the elderly and school lunches. AMS will still grade tobacco and class cotton, and administer the market news program, marketing agreements and orders, commodity research and promotion programs, food and marketing alert, and 14 other regulatory programs. Meanwhile, APHIS will continue to administer programs to protect plants and animals from diseases and pests, ensure that import/export standards are met for farm animals and products, and promote humane treatment of animals used in agricultural trade, research, and exhibitions. The administrator of FSQS will report directly to the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Food and Consumer Services, itself a new position.

### LANDSCAPING THOUGHTS

Vines Are Versatile. Careful use of vines can solve many landscaping problems. Vines can serve as screens for needed privacy; as ground covers to stabilize eroding banks and hide unsightly bare spots; as camouflage for walls and fences; and as sources of cut flowers, fragrance and color. And they don't take up much space. As yard and garden plants go, vines take only a little care, but they do need some attention and direction. Vines run amok can be a problem, so a word of caution: Masonry walls are good supports for vines; wooden walls are not. Wooden walls are easily damaged by the weight of the vine and the moisture held in the foliage. Too, vines should not be allowed to grow above the rain gutter on a house. Once established on a roof, they are extremely difficult to remove. If not removed, they will cause a great deal of damage to shingles. So discipline your vines; teach them good clinging manners. Let them climb the wall, not you.



## FOOD FACTS AND FIGURES

Where Did All The Money Go? According to an annual report issued by USDA's Economic Research Service:

\*Consumers spent an estimated \$164 billion in 1976 for foods produced on U.S. farms. These foods had a value of \$54 billion when they left the farm. The \$110 billion difference represents the total marketing bill, or the sum of charges made by various marketing agencies--including processors, wholesalers, retailers, and public eating places--for transporting, processing and distributing farm goods.

\*Consumers set two eating records in 1976. We consumed a record 129 pounds of beef per person, an increase of 7 percent from 1975, and ate 56 pounds of food fats and oils, a new high and 4 pounds more per capita than in 1975.

\*Labor is the largest cost of marketing farm foods, accounting for about 51 percent of the marketing bill.

\*The farmer's share of the consumer's dollar spent for frying chicken averaged 51 percent in 1976, compared with 54 percent in 1975 and 56 percent in 1974.

\*The farm value of all ingredients in bread totaled 5.5 cents per pound, about 18 percent lower than in 1975.

\*The more a commodity is changed from the time it leaves the farm until it reaches the consumer, the higher the processing costs and usually the smaller the farmer's share. Processing costs make up about one-half of the retail store price of catsup and one-third that of frozen orange juice. In contrast, processing costs less than 15 percent of the retail prices for beef and pork, broilers and eggs, and fluid milk, all of which are changed relatively little after they leave the farm.

\*These fascinating food facts and figures are from "Developments in Marketing Spreads for Agricultural Products in 1976" (AER-367), the annual USDA assessment of food prices, farm retail price spread, marketing costs, productivity, profits and marketing bill. In essence, the report tells why food prices are rising, or falling, or staying the same. Writers, teachers, consumer organizations, or anyone dealing with food economics will find the report informative and helpful. Single free copies are available from the Publications Division, Room 0054-S, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

## NEW PROCESS FOR PRESERVING WOOD

It Keeps Wood As You Like It. Scientists of USDA's Forest Service recently developed a wood preserving process that is non-polluting and non-toxic. Yet the process protects wood from termites (they won't eat it); fungi (they can't digest it); and weather conditions (the wood doesn't swell when it gets wet or shrink when it gets dry). The new technique, treatment of wood with butylene oxide, actually alters the chemical structure of wood slightly and the chemicals become part of the wood itself. Thus, they are not leached out by rain or other weather elements. Also, because the chemicals become part of the wood cell wall, wood volume is increased, an advantage to many processors. The treatment, which takes up to about 30 minutes, does not change dramatically the wood's color or natural beauty; and the wood can be used in construction immediately after the treatment. The researchers say this type of treatment could be applied to wood used for many purposes, including window units, furniture, musical instruments, molds for car parts, and mill work.



## QUARTERLY ANALYSIS

Reporting Food Economics To Consumers. The National Food Situation is a quarterly report of USDA's Economic Research Service. Since World War II it has reported on the state of the Nation's food supplies, demand for food, and food prices. With the March 1977 issue--No. 159--the National Food Situation added to this coverage information on other food-related developments of interest to consumer writers and editors, consumer affairs professionals, teachers, and others who need and use consumer food economics data. Regular departments in the "new" National Food Situation will cover developments in marketing, USDA rulemaking, legislative developments, consumer research developments, and perspectives on new and old topics. A look at the contents of the March issue gives you an idea of the wide ranging and pertinent reporting consumers can expect. There's a summary of recent developments in food prices, consumption, and supplies; a brief report on consumer-buying clubs and automated checkout in food stores; reports on the effect of health concerns on the diet and consumer satisfaction with food products and services; summaries of bills introduced in the new Congress dealing with food and its many aspects; a list of recent USDA actions and proposals on food assistance programs and grades; and many other topics and special features. To be on the mailing list for the quarterly report--the next one will be out in June--write to: National Food Situation, ERS/NEAD, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 500 12th Street, SW, Room 260, Washington, D.C. 20250. There is no charge.

## COMMENTS RECEIVED

Decision Made. There won't be any formulated fortified milk-based products this summer, kids. The proposal to use these products as a snack alternate in USDA's Summer Food Program for children has been withdrawn by the Department. The proposal was made last summer to authorize the use of these products as an alternative food for the two-component snack served in the Summer Food Program. The two-component snack consists of a serving of milk or juice or fruit or vegetable and a serving of bread or bread equivalent. The public was invited to comment on whether the formulated foods would provide summer food service institutions with a convenient, nutritious alternative. According to USDA officials, many of the comments received from the public were negative and inconclusive as to the benefits to be derived from the products. The level of nutrition provided by the proposed alternate food is satisfactory, USDA officials said, but conventional foods provide a comparable or higher level of nutrition when food service personnel use sound menu planning. The level of convenience afforded by the formulated products is not sufficient reason to justify use of the one-component alternative, the officials said.

## THE BITTER AND THE SWEET

Nature Had A Surprise. It all started with grapefruit. In the early 1960's, scientists of USDA's Agricultural Research Service converted naringin, a natural substance in grapefruit peel, into Neohesperidin dihydrochalcone, called Neo DHC for easier conversation. Since naringin is the intensely bitter substance in the peel, researchers expected to find that Neo DHC was also bitter. Instead, they found the opposite. Neo DHC turned out to be about 1,500 times as sweet as sugar. After running a series of animal feeding studies spanning 10 years, the researchers did not uncover any apparent toxicity from Neo DHC. Now, with sugar and its synthetic substitutes receiving bad marks, super-sweet, low-calorie Neo DHC may become a suitable sugar substitute in some products. The first of these will likely be toothpaste or mouthwash or chewing gum. Neo DHC leaves a lingering sweet aftertaste, a desirable feature for such products. Another happy note: Grapefruit peel is commonly used as livestock feed. Recovering the naringin for the synthetic sweetener does not affect the feed value of the peel. Nature is just full of sweet wonders.

## USDA PUBLICATIONS

New, Revised, and Revived. USDA recently issued several publications about food, from various aspects, and a variety of other topics of interest to consumers. Among these are:

FOOD PROGRAMS OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (PA-1161). Brief descriptions of the food assistance programs administered by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service are given in this new 11-page pamphlet. Also included are locations of FNS regional offices and lists of publications that give more detailed information on each food program. Single free copies of the pamphlet are available from the Information Division, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

HOW TO USE USDA GRADES IN BUYING FOODS (G-196). This updated and revised pocket-sized booklet shows the official grademarks used on meat, eggs, poultry, dairy products, and fresh, canned and frozen fruits and vegetables. It explains what the grades mean for each product and gives tips on how to use the various grades in food shopping. Single free copies are available from the Office of Communication, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

FAMILY FOOD BUDGETING FOR GOOD MEALS AND GOOD NUTRITION (G-94). In this popular and handy booklet, which has undergone major revision, are four readymade food plans that can help families choose nutritious food at prices they can afford. The plans--the thrifty, the low-cost, the moderate-cost, and the liberal--show the amounts of food from various food groups that are needed to provide well-balanced meals and snacks for family members. One of the four plans will probably fit your family situation.\*

MUSHROOM GROWING IN THE UNITED STATES (F-1875). A steadily increasing interest in mushrooms--both eating and growing them--prompted USDA to revive this bulletin. While the information in the bulletin is primarily on commercial growing and marketing of mushrooms, there are brief sections on the history of the mushroom industry, nutritional values, and drying and freezing. One section deals with mushroom growing at home for a fascinating winter hobby and your own personal mushroom supply.\*

THE NARCISSUS BULB FLY (L-444). You may think it's a small bumble bee, but it may not be. It may be a narcissus bulb fly. Your narcissus knows the difference. Now you can, too, with this revised booklet as a guide to identification of the fly and its damage to narcissus and the measures needed to prevent and control the pest.\*

TREATING FARMSTEAD AND RURAL HOME WATER SYSTEMS (F-2248). Safe water of good quality is usually taken for granted by persons who turn on the tap for treated, sanitized and clear water from the city reservoir. But not every home is plumbed into the reservoir. Such places as farm homes, beach cottages, or mountain hideaways may have their own water sources and systems, the safety and quality of which cannot always be taken for granted. This revised bulletin discusses water sources, water testing and treatment, and lists some common water quality problems, their signs, causes and cures.\*

\*Available for 35 cents a copy from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

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SERVICE is a monthly newsletter of consumer interest. It is designed for those who report to the individual consumer rather than for mass distribution. For information about items in this issue, write Lillie Vincent, Editor of Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Special Reports Division, Room 459-A, Washington, D.C. 20250, or telephone 202-447-5437.

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